

POSITIVE DIALOGUE:
Skills that build trust and teamwork in your staff
OCASI CONFERENCE

November 3, 2015, 9:45 AM to 12:30 PM

Facilitated by Janis Galway

DEFINITION OF POSITIVE DIALOGUE

A way of relating and communicating that allows teams to build resilient relationships, and constructively handle conflicts and challenges.

GOALS OF THE WORKSHOP

1. Understand more clearly the dynamics that impact positive dialogue in our agencies, including cultural differences, oppression issues and life experiences amongst staff.
2. Improve listening skills and know useful guidelines that effectively engage others in positive dialogue.
3. Be more skilled in finding the underlying “hurt spots” in situations of conflict and oppression.
4. Be better able to set a positive tone in the workplace and build relationships of trust where positive dialogue can happen.

USEFUL GUIDELINES FOR POSITIVE DIALOGUE

- Listen for breakthrough understandings; suspend your judgment and try not to get defensive. (And don't worry - listening is not agreeing.)
- Express yourself to be understood, not to win an argument.
- Be willing to show some vulnerability when called for and as appropriate – eg your fear or sadness.
- Risk making mistakes – and be ready to apologize when you do!
- Share airtime and include everyone. (eg consider the Quaker Meeting guideline that no one speaks twice until everyone speaks once.)
- Respect confidentiality.
- Expect respect for positional responsibility but don't abuse positional power

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AGENDA*

**Note that agenda items are subject to change depending on group needs. A break will happen midway.*

Welcome, definitions and goals for the workshop

Opening Go-round

Name, agency and position, one quality (word or phrase) that makes you good at dialoguing and building relationships with others.

Agenda

Guidelines for Positive Dialogue

Which of these guidelines stand out for you/speaks to you as being really important?

Factors Impacting Positive Dialogue, Teamwork and Trust

Which factors have you seen affecting relationships/dialogue/trust at your agency?

The impact when positive dialogue is working, and when it isn't (handout)

Celebration Circles

Celebration of different identities (eg heritage, age, occupation) as a starting place for trust and dialogue

The "isms" and dialogue

The impact of racism, sexism, men's oppression, classism, etc on dialogue in our agencies

What is an oppression issue that in your experience makes it hard for people to maintain positive dialogue with each other?

Focused Listening Skills that Build Trust and Facilitate Dialogue

Demonstration of common mistakes in listening, and practicing of focused listening in pairs

Topic for pairs: *Someone who has listened to you well and the impact on your life.*

Culture Line

A body voting activity exploring cultural differences in communication styles and how "culture bumps" can be aggravated by oppression issues

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Another Positive Dialogue skill: looking for the underlying issues

In listening circles, practicing looking for the issues beneath the surface

Closing Highlights and Evaluation

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Importance of Positive Dialogue in Our Agencies

WHEN POSITIVE DIALOGUE IS WORKING WELL, PEOPLE:

- reach out, and build relationships with others who are different from themselves
- they listen to each other
- they engage in positive dialogue even in situations of disagreement and conflict; they stay hopeful about connecting and working things out
- they are empathetic to others
- they try to understand others' cultures and experiences; they question their own biases and assumptions
- they are willing to look at how they might be oppressive
- they are willing to share and be vulnerable when it's helpful
- they value relationship-building skills as part of being "professional"
- they work to build trust
- they remember their common purpose with others

WHEN IT ISN'T, PEOPLE:

- are isolated; stay with their "own kind"
- they criticize, attack, and gossip about each other
- they give up on working things out
- they blame and judge others
- they assume their way is "normal"
- they are defensive and often in denial about oppression
- they are closed, guarded and fearful
- they focus only on tasks, and devalue relationship- building
- they don't trust
- they lose sight of their common purpose with others

A useful commitment:

To maximize our effectiveness in fulfilling our mission, our agency will strive to be a team that benefits fully from the assets of a diverse staff, and constructively

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handles conflicts and oppressive situations through positive dialogue.

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Focused Listening

DON'T

- ☆ Get distracted
- ☆ Tell your own story
- ☆ Give premature advice
- ☆ Interview the person about what you want to know

DO

- ☆ Have a friendly, interested expression
- ☆ Have attentive body posture appropriate to the culture
- ☆ Use eye contact or avoid eye contact as culturally appropriate
- ☆ Use attentive, encouraging sounds and words
- ☆ Only ask questions that take the person further down their path

Listening pair with a partner:

Take the available time, and divide it in half. Use a timer. Decide who will speak first. While the first person speaks, the other person does supportive listening. When the timer goes off, the two people switch roles. The speaker becomes the listener and the listener becomes the speaker.

The speaker can talk about what is on their mind related to a particular topic, struggle or success, or they can speak about whatever they wish. They can also be silent and thoughtful. It is their time to be listened to with good attention, whatever they choose to do with their listening turn.

If they are listened to well, people may express emotion during their turn, including joy, anger or sadness. The listener does not need to solve any problems or worry about the speaker having feelings – they just need to continue to listen with genuine empathy and support. Supportive listening helps reduce stress, and help people think clearly about things.

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